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August 14, 1981

Mr. Richard Dine
Assistant Director
Task Force on Foreign Policy
House Republican Research Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Dine:

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to review the Task Force on Foreign Policy's draft paper on military sales to Saudi Arabia. I would like to offer a few brief comments and clarifications.

Tankers - The Administration proposes to offer Saudi Arabia the purchase of six (not seven) KC-707 aircraft (not KC-135) with an option to purchase two additional planes.

AWACS - In your discussion of the battle-management capability of the AWACS system (page 2, last paragraph), you use the term "friendly aircraft" which might give the impression that other Arab air forces might be directed by Saudi-operated AWACS. AWACS data is in fact extremely perishable; effective battle-management requires compatible data links between the AWACS, ground control stations, and the interceptor aircraft. The necessary communications equipment can be supplied only from the United States. We see the system performing primarily as an airborne early warning system with a look-down radar capability.

Cost - The cost of the five E-3A aircraft and related support infrastructure is estimated at $5.8 billion (p.2).

AIM-9L Missile - While the AIM-9L is the most sophisticated missile of its class presently in the U.S. inventory, it is due to be replaced shortly by the AIM-9M, a more sophisticated weapon system (p. 3).

Twenty-four Hour AWACS Coverage - With an aerial refueling capability, we estimate that the five AWACS aircraft could operate single orbit coverage on a twenty-four hour basis for a maximum of one week (pp. 3-4).

Saudi Support for U.S. Interests and Initiatives in the Region - Critics of the sale do emphasize that the Saudis have not supported the Camp David agreements. You might point out in the "positive position", that the supporters of the sale argue that Saudi Arabia has offered constructive -- and sometimes essential -- support to a wide range of U.S. peace initiatives in the region, most recently to the successful efforts of Ambassador Habib in achieving a cease-fire in Lebanon. The Saudis gave guarded support to the Camp David process until they became convinced that it would not lead to the type of comprehensive agreement between Israel and all its neighbors (including the Palestinians) which Saudi public opinion strongly supports. While rejecting the Egyptian-Israeli Treaty, we do not believe that they have actively attempted to undermine it, and they continue to support the concept of a peaceful, comprehensive solution to the ME conflict (p. 5).

Saudi "Aggression" - (p. 6, last paragraph) I believe the term "aggression" may be misleading. Saudi Arabia has never attacked Israel, and it is highly unlikely to in the future. While we acknowledge that the Saudi package will complicate Israeli defense planning, we do not believe it will measurably increase the threat to Israel. You may wish to state that you understand the Administration is committed to helping Israel maintain its qualitative edge in the overall regional balance.

American Personnel - It is envisioned that some American contractor personnel will be required for the continued operation of the Saudi AWACS for the life of the system, not merely until the 1990's. The U.S. operates its own AWACS in Saudi Arabia on the basis of an agreement with the Saudi Government, and does so in the national security interests of the United States (p. 7).

Saudi Participation in Previous Arab-Israel Wars - Saudi Arabia has not always been willing to deploy "what little it did have" in previous Arab/Israeli wars. A Saudi ambulance group did operate behind Egyptian lines during the October 1973 conflict. The overwhelming bulk of the country's military strength, however, was retained at home. Nor has Saudi Arabia been a major "financer of these wars." It is correct to say that they provided financial assistance to Egypt prior to the 1973 war; it would be more accurate to also mention that this contributed to the expulsion of Soviet advisors from Egypt in 1972 and the reconciliation between Egypt and the United States; significant U.S. foreign policy objectives (p. 7, para 3).

Saudi Military Purchases - Saudi Arabia has spent or committed itself to $34 billion in military related purchases from the United States since 1973. However, only $5.5 billion has been for weapons systems and related equipment. Over half of the figure is for construction, much of which has complementary civilian uses (roads, hospitals, airports, etc.). A substantial additional portion has gone to training (p. 7, para 4).

Ground Attack Capability - In quoting former Defense Secretary Brown, you include a promise not to sell items that would "enhance the ground attack capability of the F-15." There is nothing in the package the President plans to send to Congress that would specifically enhance the ground attack capability of the F-15 (p. 8, para 2).

"Quid Pro Quo."- On page 8, last paragraph, second line, do you mean 'unlikely" rather than "likely?"

I would like to offer one final comment. The debate thus far over the AWACS/F-15 enhancement proposal has been cast, by some, in terms of weighing the value of the security of Saudi Arabia against that of the security of Israel. This can be misleading; the Administration is strongly committed to the security of all of the friendly states in the region, including both Israel and Saudi Arabia. We believe the real issue, however, is neither Saudi nor Israeli security, but American interests and American security, and see the proposal as a positive step in the promotion

and protection of our own national interests. At the same time, we see the sale contributing to the security of both Saudi and Israeli security, as it will enhance, not detract from, political stability in the region.

I hope you will find these comments useful, and again thank you for the courtesy you have shown in sending me the draft.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Aherne
Special Assistant